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October 23, 2003

President George W. Bush  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20502

Dear Mr. President:

I write to you today out of great concern for the ongoing violence in Israel and the occupied territories. Since the second Intifada began, nearly 4,000 people, Israeli and Palestinian, have been killed. It is a rare week that passes that does not include reports of the deaths of civilians on both sides of the conflict. Grief and anger are now constant emotions, taking the place of the hope and optimism that followed the Oslo process.

On June 4 of this year, you traveled to Aqaba, Jordan and announced to the world that America "will ride herd" in moving the peace process forward. To many around the world, your statement that America would be fully engaged and bring to the peace process its prestige, perseverance, and can-do spirit, provided no small amount of hope. The commitment of our nation to a secure Israel living as a neighbor with a democratic Palestine was sorely needed. It showed the world that the United States could be counted on to provide leadership and wisdom. By advocating the Roadmap to Peace, we showed the world our commitment to ending the cycle of violence and creating a better future for all Israelis and Palestinians.

In the wake of a renewed cycle of bombing-counterstrike-bombing-counterstrike, it is our abdication of the Roadmap, not its advocacy that I am concerned with. In the weeks following Aqaba, Mahmoud Abas, the Palestinian Prime Minister, urged the administration for the assistance he so sorely needed to meet Israeli demands and assert authority over the entrenched Palestinian leadership. As Mr. Abas struggled to establish Palestinian accountability the construction and maintenance of illegal settlements continued unabated. Instead of active engagement with the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority, the absence of sustained US leadership allowed the tragic inertia of the last three years to overtake the Roadmap.

The two prerequisites of the Roadmap, the dismantling of settlements and the destruction of terror networks, were not vigorously pursued by either side because our government did not hold the parties accountable to their obligations. Prime Minister Abas could not adequately combat the terrorists because he lacked the resources needed, both political and material, to go after the enemies of peace. The continued terror allowed the cycle of violence to further undermine the Roadmap, dissuading both Israelis and Palestinians from recognizing the importance of peace.

Mr. Abbas was further weakened in the eyes of his own people because of the continued appropriation of Palestinian lands and the persistent military presence in certain Palestinian communities. All the while, American leadership seemed aloof, and Aqaba a distant memory. In the last seven weeks, Prime Minister Abbas resigned in frustration; terrorists have murdered scores; Israeli airstrikes recently killed ten Palestinians and injured one hundred more. The process is in tatters, if it even exists anymore, and American prestige is at a remarkably low level, not because of our actions but because of our inaction.

This is a crisis that cannot wait to be addressed. People are dying. The Israeli economy is near collapse, the Palestinian people have the highest unemployment in the Arab world, and the governments of each seem content to continue the cycle of violence to the detriment of the people they are supposed to represent..

Mr. President, the peace process needs your involvement. It saves lives. From September 4, 1997 until November 2, 2000, the high point of the Oslo Process, there was only one reported terrorist incident, taking the life of one Israeli soldier. For more than three years, Israel suffered only one casualty from terrorism. The difference between then and now is that the full weight of the executive branch- the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the President himself- were working in concert with the Israelis and the Palestinians to forge a better future.

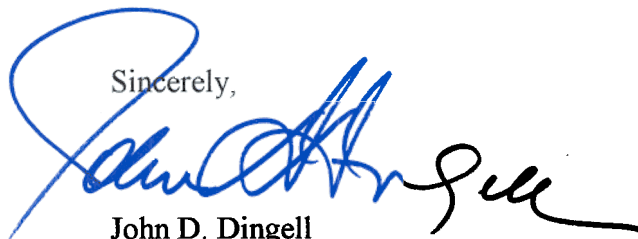
Now is the time to reengage and reinvigorate the process. A new Palestinian Prime Minister, Ahmed Qureia, has been named. He, too, is seeking control of the Palestinian security apparatus, and with US pressure he might be able to succeed where his predecessor failed. The Israeli public, according to recent polls, has grown weary of the reflexive retaliation policy of the Israeli government. They seem ready to take risks for peace that their government is not. American guidance can help spur both these proud and war weary peoples to make a stand for peace.

The Israeli-Palestinian crisis remains the central conflict in the Middle East. Each death and each act of violence reverberates throughout the entire region. It is at the core of the recruitment strategies for terrorist groups and is linked to the rising tide of anti-Americanism throughout the Muslim world. Solving this conflict matters as much to our own national security as does any situation anywhere else in the world.

The personal involvement of the President is needed, not just for the Israelis and Palestinians, but for our nation's security interests. The world needs to know that the United States fully intends to work towards a solution. It is my hope that the world can hear first hand, your continued commitment to the Israeli and Palestinian people. The task at hand, sadly, is no longer to implement the Roadmap, but to get the parties back on the road.

With every good wish,

Sincerely,



John D. Dingell  
Member of Congress